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AUTHOR Brunner, C. Cryss
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine--using single-case qualitative ethnographic methods--how an urban superintendent responded to a "crisis in representation" with the intent that such an examination will be instructive for other superintendents faced with similar challenges. opens with a description of methodology followed by a brief discussion about "The Media." Next, two major sections entitled "The Newspaper's and Dr. Kelly's Definitions and Uses of Power" and "The Newspaper and Dr. Kelly View Each Other" weave the narrative data, data analysis, and discussion together. The third major section, which focuses on "Dr. Kelly's Effect on the 'Crisis in Representation' and the Press," presents information gathered during onsite visits. Finally, five findings are reported and two conclusions are advanced. The superintendent's response to the media was effective, in part, because of her definition and use of power. The need for superintendents to be skilled in representation and in the use of power as shared is emphasized. (RJM)

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FACING A CRISIS IN REPRESENTATION: AN URBAN SUPERINTENDENT AND THE PRESS

C. Cryss Brunner

Assistant Professor

University of Wisconsin-Madison

1025 West Johnson Street

Educational Sciences Building

Madison, WI 53706

(608) 265-4772

fax: (608) 265-3135

brunner@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

FACING A CRISIS IN REPRESENTATION: AN URBAN SUPERINTENDENT AND THE PRESS

C. Cryss Brunner, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"The schools and the media may never be an entirely comfortable fit, but each can do better to meet the other's needs."

(Kaplan, 1992, p. 141)

"How many times have the media taken refuge behind the shield of free speech? Media have become synonymous with conscienceless paparazzi. It's time to clean up their act."

(Jeffs, 1997)

Princess Diana's death brought an outraged public's attention to the behavior of the media. In a less noticed arena, superintendents across the nation frequently need to deal with unfair, dominating acts of media representation that marginalize or silence the voices of educators, students, or communities.

From my perspective, dominant, intimidating positions taken by the press, are actions based on an understanding of power in the classical sense, that is, as authority, control, or "power over" others (Hartsock, 1987). Such an intimidating position -- especially if negative -- has the potential to do harm, not only because it can create hostility, but also because it has the potential to affect the way people view themselves and each other. To be sure, public school educators, students, parents, and their communities have a right to be full participants in the construction of official knowledge related to their experiences, histories, needs, ways of knowing the world, and social positions.

The purpose of this paper is to examine -- using single-case qualitative ethnographic methods -- how an urban superintendent responded to a "crisis in representation" (Ellsworth, 1994) -- with the intent that such an examination will be instructive for other superintendents faced

with similar challenges. This crisis was created when a newspaper dominated a community and its school district by using what many participants reported to be "purposeful misrepresentation."

The paper begins with a description of the methods of the study followed by a brief discussion about "The Media." Next, two major sections entitled "The Newspaper's and Dr. Kelly's Definitions and Uses of Power" and "The Newspaper and Dr. Kelly View Each Other" weave the narrative data -- gathered in the first on-site visit -- data analysis, and discussion together. In the third major section, "Dr. Kelly's Affect on the 'Crisis in Representation' and the Press," the paper presents data and discussion gathered during a second on-site visit, one year after the first on-site visit. Then in the "Findings and Conclusion" section, five findings are reported and two conclusions are advanced. The first conclusion states that the superintendent's response to the media was effective, in part, because of her definition and use of power -- "power with/to" work collaboratively to accomplish common goals, shared power (Brunner, 1995). The second forwards that superintendents need to be skilled in the politics of representation and in the use of power as shared is suggested.

Methods[1]

This ethnographic single-case study (1994-98) was part of a multi-case study of eight districts focused on power, superintendents, and decision-making. This case study was done in a large urban school district (over 130,000 students) in the Southeast (an urban area of around 1.3 million people). Data were collected from records, documents, participant and non-participant observation, and over 72 in-depth interviews that were recorded and transcribed. Interviews were conducted with school district personnel (teachers, administrators, staff), community members (political figures, business people, parents, students), board of education members, journalists, and the superintendent. At least twelve of the 72 interviews were conducted with the superintendent over a period of four years. The superintendent, who had recently moved from a

superintendency position in another district, was in her first year in the studied district when my first extended on-site visit occurred.

The interview approach was non-standardized, a free-flowing design intended to elicit a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data analysis focused on understanding the superintendent's definition and use of power and the power relationships between the media, on one hand, and the school district/superintendent and the community at-large on the other. The analysis followed established methods (emergent themes, categorization of data) of single-case qualitative research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1994).

The Selection of Dr. Kelly

The primary participant, Dr. Kelly, was a 47 year old, European American woman superintendent who was in the first year of her third superintendency at the time of the study. She had a doctorate in educational administration and had nine years of superintendency experience at the time of the study. Dr. Kelly was considered by a panel of experts (and by those who had worked with her in other districts and settings) to be one of the most exceptional superintendents in the nation.

As one of eight superintendents selected out of the nation for my multi-case national study[2], I will describe how the sample including Dr. Kelly and seven others was identified. During the first stage (1992-96) of sample selection, I developed of a list of potential participants -- from a national list of superintendents -- men and women who were known to be exceptionally successful superintendents. I completed this task by relying on judgments of a national panel of experts familiar with superintendents throughout the country. The panel included two national "head hunters," two executive directors of professional superintendent associations, five university professors, two owners of large businesses, and fifteen superintendents. I asked panel members for names of men and women.

The initial list (after I further narrowed it for logistical reasons) of potential participants included 47 superintendents -- 22 women and 25 men -- from the extreme Northeast, northern

Midwest, central Midwest, southern Midwest, and Southeast parts of the United States. These men and women had responsibility for districts ranging in size from under 300 to over 800,000 students (two state superintendents). They had been superintendents ranging from 2 to 29 years. All but three, who were African American[3], were European American. They ranged in age from early forties to mid-sixties.

In order to establish how these superintendents defined and used power, I interviewed each of them, as well as two other people[4] within each school district who could triangulate superintendent interviews -- a total of 141 respondents. The interviews, which were recorded and transcribed, were most often conducted face-to-face in settings convenient for the participants. Moat interviews were conducted in offices, but several triangulation interviews were conducted over the phone. Interviews were a minimum of an hour in length. Superintendents were interviewed at least twice for a total of 188 interviews.[5]

Definitions and uses of power that were described during interviews with the initial sample of superintendents (and two others who knew them) fell into three general categories: 17 defined and used power as "power over," 23 defined and used power as "power with/to," and 7 defined power using mixed definitions. Most of the power over definitions came from men, and most of the power with/to definitions came from women. Briefly, 15 men defined power as power over, 4 defined it using a mixed definition, and 6 defined it as power with/to. In contrast, 2 women defined power as power over, 3 defined it using a mixed definition, and 17 defined it as power with/to.[6]

It is important to note that if the sample had been constructed to reflect the percentages of men (93%) and women (7%) currently in the superintendency, the sample would have included 25 men and only 2 women. The inflated number of women likely resulted in far more power with/to definitions.

I do not want to give the reader the impression that the three categories were rigid and exact. As with all narrative data, the answers to the interview questions varied enormously. Further, I do not want to give the impression that any of the superintendents were always

authoritarian or always collaborative in practice. Without a doubt, all superintendents used both types of power. It was the degree to which they practiced one way or the other -- verified in triangulation -- that was important when categorizing their definitions and uses of power. When I narrowed the sample, I focused on superintendents whose definitions and uses of power fell most clearly into either the "power over" or "power with/to" categories. Superintendents whose definitions fell into the "mixed" category, while interesting, were set aside. Dr. Kelly, as can be seen in the section "Dr. Kelly's Definition and Use of Power," was in the category of "power with/to."

Dr. Kelly was selected for this single case study because she was considered extremely successful as a superintendent, and she was faced with an attack by the press. Her response to this difficult situation is instructive.

The Media

> At one time or another, our sprawling educational enterprise with its 105,000 schools, 46 million students, 2.2 million teachers, and 15,500 school districts engages the energies of nearly one-third of our population. And the success or failure of this massive endeavor, as we are reminded hourly, will have a crucial impact on the American future. How could any journalist resist an opportunity to chronicle and interpret this vast story? (Kaplan, 1992, p. 23)

Clearly, journalist do not resist this opportunity. Almost daily, even in the smallest of communities, a story related to education finds its way into the media. To be sure, some reporting seems balanced -- telling the good and the bad news about education. But consider this assertion from veteran publicist Frank Mankiewicz that "sooner or later everybody will know the dirty little secret of American journalism, that the reports are wrong. . . . Whenever you see a news story you were part of, it is always wrong" (quoted in Kaplan, 1992, p. 15).

Common sense alone tells us that it is difficult to include everything that belongs in a story, that it is impossible to know exactly what should be considered news in the first place. Even Herbert Gans's scholarly work, Deciding What's News (1980), has only partially succeeded in balancing the forces that make such decisions (Kaplan, 1992). In short, there is an awareness on the part of journalists that even the "best" reporting is "wrong." Journalists admit that even in the best of situations, few people receive what their partisans consider to be accurate and balanced coverage (Kaplan, 1992).

Beyond this awareness, there is concern even among people who are editors, journalists, media analysts, and communication/media experts regarding what is considered by many to be a decline in the credibility of journalism. One of the participants in the study who, at one time or another during his life, fell into all the categories of work mentioned above expressed this concern by pointing to

> *an alarming trend toward the media having an agenda in a public capacity and relentlessly moving forward to get that agenda done because of the desire to make money. . . . And when you disguise an agenda or sensationalism or a vendetta or whatever, as news, that borders on criminal acts to me. Because then you're really trying to fool the public.*

What if a press decides to purposely report only negative news, to purposely slant the news in a way that is damaging? What about the ethics of reporting? In a capitalist society, does the question of what sells take precedence over ethics? And what does damaging reporting about public schools mean for the students and educators?

It is not the intent of this paper to address these questions. Rather, the study examined the use of collaborative power as an effective response to authoritarian, dominating, "power over" acts by a particular press. Toward that end an exploratory, single-case study was done of a site where a press [Newspaper] used its authoritarian power to "purposely misrepresent" a woman superintendent and a school district. (Newspaper is used throughout the paper in place of the actual name of the press studied.) Clearly, effective responses from superintendents are important when superintendents work to negotiate the relationship between the press and the public schools.

The next section analyzes the narrative data through discussion designed to examine how the Newspaper and the superintendent defined and used power. The section opens with a brief paragraph outlining the two primary definitions and uses of power.

The Newspaper's and Dr. Kelly's Definitions and Uses of Power: Discourse, Analysis, and Discussion

[Data Gathered During First On-Site Visit (January - February, 1997)]

Theoretical analyses of the concept of power generally occur along two primary trajectories (Clegg, 1989, p. 21-38; Hartsock, 1981, p. 3-19; Pitkin, 1972, p. 276-77; Stone, 1989, p. 219-33; Wartenberg, 1990, p. 9-50). The dominant trajectory in the history of political thought and in contemporary political science defines power as control, command, domination over others -- as "power over" (Clegg, 1989; Hartsock, 1981). The subordinate (less emphasized, analyzed, and appreciated) trajectory defines power as a capacity to accomplish certain social goals through cooperation among agents with various interests and concerns -- as "power with/to" (Follett, 1942; Sarason, 1990).

The Newspaper's Definition and Use of Power

One businessman interviewee, described the Newspaper in this way:

One of the reasons the Newspaper is such an anomaly is because it is a privately held company. Privately held companies behave differently than publicly held companies. So that dynamic is different. . . . But at another level, the one thing I find objectionable about the Newspaper is that the Newspaper comes in and is surprisingly personal in both its news reporting and particularly in its editorial position. So, that's a really important thing. . . . I think they're not [original emphasis] *constructive. . . . The Newspaper has a*

vindictive kind of a feel to it. And clearly, the Newspaper is the singularly most influential media vehicle in most of this county.

Although just one of three newspapers in the county, the Newspaper was considered by participants as the most influential, the most powerful -- in fact, as the man quoted above said, the Newspaper was the "singularly most influential media vehicle in most of the county." The opinions and perceptions advanced by the Newspaper were known by all the people I interviewed. It was evident, from the interviews, (even early in the study) that the Newspaper was perceived to define and use power as "power over." Consider the statement made by a school district administrator:

The Newspaper sees itself as being a social engineer, and that's fine, but they are not objective, and they choose sides. And being a social engineer, they also want to be the boss.

A press that wants to be boss may not sound that unusual to the reader. But, as I continued to listen to those I interviewed, the issue of the negative reporting by the Newspaper was on peoples minds. Many were angry about what they considered unfair and abusive use of power by the press. Unsolicited remarks were made in myriad interviews. For example, people who had a wide variety of experiences with the media, in other communities, made powerful statements about the viciousness of what people considered the "attack mode" of the Newspaper. One male board of education member said:

What do you do when a newspaper's got an editorial staff, if not a news staff, that's in attack mode -- confrontational -- that's just any kind of nasty attitude that you can imagine about the way they approach problems and issues.

I've never [original emphasis] seen a newspaper that attacks individuals in their editorials. They may attack an issue or an approach, but rarely, if ever, will they say something negative about an individual whom they name or a group of individuals whom they name. And the Newspaper does that as common practice. I mean, it's just -- it's rude. They had an editorial about my predecessor on the board. They said, "She's not fit

to run a lemonade stand." That doesn't belong in a quality newspaper editorial. And it's crazy . . . for a while there it was fascinating -- I would call them up, you know and compliment them on a particular stance that they took, or I would take issue with them on something. I'm pretty blatantly open, as you can probably tell. I'm trusting I guess. I don't think of people as being diabolical -- like I don't think that they will look for things in what I say to use against me. And yet, when I talked to the editorial people from the [Newspaper], for a time there, I could almost count on three or four or five days later that my name would come up in an editorial about something that was totally different than what the focus of the conversation was. They would pick something out of the conversation that I had with them, on some other issue, and chastise me for my point of view. Fascinating, you know. We weren't even engaging in that conversation. But they used something I said out of context in a way to talk about me negatively.

A media analyst who was a former journalist confirmed the board member's sense that his words were used out of context. The analyst said:

With the [Newspaper] what you find is that you may be talking about apples, and then during the conversation there are two or three sentences about oranges, and then two or three days later, that little piece of orange information comes out in a really negative way. So, they're deciphering only their own agenda's information and cutting that out of the conversations -- cutting out the pieces that will support their own agenda. So it becomes extremely frustrating to even have a dialogue with them.

The male board member quoted above continued his commentary:

And the people here are so used to it that they think all newspapers do this -- they think it is common practice. And all this negativity when so much good stuff, exciting stuff is happening. What's such a shame is that if the Newspaper would refocus their energies in a positive direction, the whole county could just pop all at once in terms of the positive things that could happen. Even if the reporting was just balanced. It could be remarkable what would happen in short order here.

Almost everyone I interviewed agree with this man's statement that "people were so used to" the abusive behavior from the Newspaper. Even with two other newspapers in the county that were much more balanced in their reporting, the community was "silenced" by "attacks" from the Newspaper. One board of education member sounded almost helpless as he discussed the silencing:

> *In my mind the only way that we can cope with it is to try to work with the other media, other than this newspaper, to mitigate it a little bit and then hope that eventually two or three people down there that seem to have this as their obsession in life will die early or take some wonderful job opportunity somewhere else. And it's the local senior management (of the Newspaper) [that have this attitude] as far as I can tell. And, what my sources tell me.*

Other participants in the study talked about the damage that the Newspaper's dominating negative press was doing to the community and to the schools. One parent reflected, "The school system always looks worse [in the paper] than it really is." One school district administrator said it this way:

> *You would think that the business people would be concerned about the negative press [about the school system]. But everybody is waiting for someone else to do something. It's a vicious circle. I don't care about who they're talking about in the paper or what the paper slams next, it still affects the perception of the entire system. The other piece is, I think it's going to be very difficult to recruit people to a district where there is such great potential for people to be constantly torn apart. So why would they want to come?*
>
> *In fact, we've had a couple of students speak up about the fact that they were tired of being portrayed [by the press] as the kids in trouble all of the time. They said, yes, some of us are in trouble sometimes, but that is not all of the story.*

A high school teacher confirmed the comments quoted above when he expressed his concerns:

> *You know, the students never hear anything good about what they do. And people really want to hear it. They would feed on it, you know. I mean people like to get a pat on the back. The only ones [students] that get the recognition are the ones*

who bring a gun to school. Or the ones who bring a knife to school. And when I was being interviewed [He was Teacher of the Year], I said it's the media's fault. And I said that. I said they don't spend enough time focusing on the positives. And how we are going to change that? I have no idea.

Even with the overwhelming narrative data collected from the participants in the study, I felt the need to check my findings with a media expert -- whom I will refer to as Mr. Wilson -- who had knowledge of the Newspaper as well as extensive knowledge of and first hand experience in media work across the state and the nation. I asked him about his opinion about the activity of the Newspaper. Mr. Wilson stated:

In my personal dealings of probably a hundred newspapers and half as many television stations and news outlets, I would say that the [Newspaper] is the worst or the most difficult to deal with and the most clearly vendetta oriented or biased or most willing to ignore facts to pass their own agenda. . . . I am very familiar with papers all across this area. And I have dealt with them all personally. I have been inside the newsrooms everywhere in [this state], many, many times. The [Newspaper] is an enigma. Even during this trend of selfish journalism or self promotion, I still get a sense in [other newsrooms] that there's integrity. That there is an ethical basis for what they do. They slip, but there's still an ethical foundation.

I feel that the Newspaper has pushed it aside. It's like they're still aware that it exists, but it's almost scoffed at. And that's a difference between slipping off your ethical base and pushing it aside. When you decide that you're not going to write positive stories about a certain entity, and in this case a school district, that is pushing aside your ethical base. That is saying that we no longer adhere to fair journalism standards. Different societies and organizations and journalism has its professional organizations, they have standards. They have bylaws or whatever you want to call them. Ethics. Codes of conduct. And, the [Newspaper], without question, because we hear it from within as well from without, decided not to write positive stories about the school district, to only write

negative stories. That single decision, to me, is clear evidence that they've pushed aside any ethical standards.

Because I was interested, I asked, "Do you have any idea about the timing of that decision?" He replied, "Yes, I would say that the decision was clearly made when Dr. Kelly came into office." I pushed further, "Can you personally verify that the [Newspaper] made this decision, and what happened that created your knowing?" After answering that he could verify the decision, he continued:

Two things happened. One is the evidence in the press, i. e., there is nothing positive in the [Newspaper] and there is a lot of negative. But I know that is not enough. You are still left wondering if they made a conscious decision. In answer to that question, I can say that I know of interviews with two people in particular from within the [Newspaper] or formerly within the [Newspaper], who heard such conversations going on -- including the fact that a columnist and a reporter were chastised for writing something positive about the school district, chastised by top line editors. So I feel very comfortable in saying what I have said. I am not making wild accusations without some backing. And thing I guess, it's all supported by anecdotal evidence from community and readers who say, "Oh yeah, that's been going on with the [Newspaper] for a long time. Where it's almost like shrugged, "Yeah, that's the [Newspaper]. And it's an accepted community agony. I mean they don't like it, but everybody feels fairly helpless in trying to alter it.

All of the data, including my analysis of articles in the community's three papers, led me to believe that the Newspaper was purposely misrepresenting the school district. Perhaps the most powerful of all, however, was an interview with a journalist who worked for the Newspaper. He stated that "the [Newspaper] had a very dysfunctional approach to coverage of school district news," and that there was an "undue focus on what doesn't work." He believed that the editorial approach to the school district and to the superintendent had "seeped into the newsroom." Something that is not supposed to happen. He explained that the editorial board may pass judgment and draw conclusions, but that the newsroom is supposed to be objective, balanced,

factual, and is not supposed to draw conclusions. The statements from this particular journalist confirmed the assertions from the media expert, referred to as Mr. Wilson, quoted earlier. In fact, Mr. Wilson had a few things to say about the Newspaper as an organization when compared to other presses. He said:

> *In many ways they act like a small town paper. My experience generally with the media is that the larger the institution, the more you have some separation between the powers of the editor and what the reporters write. Small town papers have very close relationships to what the editors write. In fact, they may even be writing it. And so, there is much more control and much more influence, I think.*
>
> *As you get into larger institutional sized media outlets, there generally is a higher ethical standard, and there isn't this yielding to a political candidate or an advertiser because it's going to make or break the revenue. The [Newspaper] is the exception. So many things they do is like the small town weekly with this power thing. We'll show you, you know, attitude.*

An experienced journalist (in a follow-up phone interview conducted in August, 1997) in the community who did not work for the Newspaper talked about how an editor can use power in an abusive way by telling reporters what they should write about or by editing stories in ways that create a certain slant. He also stated that the effects of the editorial board may be more subtle than that. At times, he said, an editorial board may create a culture. He used the example of how newspapers become either Republican or Democrat in their political positioning. He stated that the Newspaper's editorial board advanced the attitude that the school district was bad, corrupt, and that as a result, a culture that was pointedly negative toward the public schools had developed in their newsroom.

He cited an example of a story as it had been reported in one of the county papers and contrasted it to the same story reported in the Newspaper. In this case, the story was about a mother and a daughter who had systematically stolen a large amount of money from an elderly woman. He said that the mother and the daughter just happened to be teachers. On one hand, the

headlines in one county paper read "$188,000 DRAINED FROM 103 YEAR OLD." The Newspaper, on the other hand, titled the same story as "TWO TEACHERS CHARGED WITH EXPLOITING 103 YEAR OLD." There was no need, he felt, to identify the mother and daughter as teachers, but he was convinced that the culture of the Newspaper was so strongly anti-school district that they automatically slanted the story in a way that reflected negatively on school district employees. He used this example as evidence that the editorial boards' fiercely negative perceptions of the school district had seeped into their newsroom.

I determined through interviews and documents that the editorial board at the Newspaper not only represented the district in a narrowly negative way, but also its perceptions had become the dominant "official knowledge" about the district. The district was silenced as a result, unable to represent itself. Clearly, the Newspaper used power as domination over others or as "power over. "In fact, individuals reported that the editorial board used vindictiveness at a personal level as a way to control people. These actions on the part of the press created a "crisis in representation" for the school district.

Dr. Kelly's Definition and Use of Power

When I asked Dr. Kelly to define power, she said, "Power is the ability to get things done through other people." She continued:

> *If we worry less about who gets credit and more about getting it done, it's remarkable what you can get done. . . . I'm much more comfortable saying "we" did it, because, first of all, that's the truth. I mean single-handedly, I don't know what I get done other than walk in the door. I think that everything else that happens is through the strength of the people that surround me. I don't want to be an expert in everything. And the only way that the power would be mine is if I had all the information and all the knowledge. And I just don't think that's the way it happens.*
>
> *Q. What happens when that belief system disappears?*

A. I think a good example might be in what I hear happened in the district that I've left. People say that now the decisions are more or less made by one or two people -- that others are not either involved in nor do they see themselves as responsible for the implementation. I think that is what happens as soon as you isolate decision-making to a few people. That's why even in our cabinet meetings there are people who come and go. What I mean by that is that they might not be there all of the time, but if we're working on certain issues, I involve those people because they need to give their input, but also because they need to see the attitude of the senior staff. I think that if you didn't do that, you wouldn't necessarily get the same outcome. I just don't think you get the same things done.

Clearly, Dr. Kelly's concept of power requires that she work "with/to" others. She believes strongly in input for decision-making -- she expects it from everyone, and here's how she conveys her expectations to others:

Q. How do people come to understand that you expect them to give input and to get input from others?

A. I continually ask questions, like "Well, and who said that?" And they answer, "That was so and so." And I say, "Well, let's get them here". I want them to understand that their responsibility is to bring all the people to the table. And it's probably one of the hardest things for them to catch on to. They get better, and then there's like little relapses. And the relapses occur when we are working on the most intense issues. I mean the more intense the issue is, the less likelihood they will demonstrate the inclusion piece. The more intense, the more they feel like they have to control the input.

I was curious about this questioning method. Did it work? I didn't have to ask about it directly because during triangulation, I got my answer. While talking about Dr. Kelly's use of power, a female administrator volunteered her opinion on why the questioning method worked. At the time, I was asking a female administrator to talk about Dr. Kelly's use of power, she said:

A. I think because of her very obvious expectation of involvement and input from others. It's <u>expected</u>.

Q. Earlier you said one of your former superintendents had some involvement. Is this the same?

A. No, his was an invitation. This is an expectation.

Q. Has your behavior changed as a result?

A. Well, now when I don't get input easily, I call up and ask for it. I think sometimes what happens is that when I've asked a principal for something, they are so busy, they don't get back to me. And I am expected to have the input. Dr. Kelly expects it. . . . So, I make a phone call. And, I'm trying to figure out ways to facilitate that input.

I came to understand that Dr. Kelly's questioning method worked. I saw her use it in meeting after meeting, regardless of the setting. Other administrators and teachers echoed the experiences of the administrator quoted above. They were changing their practices because of Dr. Kelly's expectations.

Dr. Kelly's collaborative concept of power was also evident in the way she reacted to explicit expectations from some of the powerwielders in the community. She talked about a conversation between herself and the powerwielders:

They expected me to fire the -- in their words -- "whole damn senior staff." And they said that they wouldn't endorse me unless I said I would do that. I said, "I'll get changes made, but, no, I won't fire everybody all at once. That's not the way you do it." "Well," they answered, "that's the way we do it in business." "Well, maybe you do," I said, "but I don't think that's how you effectively mobilize an organization."

Dr. Kelly didn't believe in an authoritarian, dominant use of power that would just "fire everyone." Her beliefs were strong enough that even the not-so-veiled threats that she would lose the endorsement of the powerwielders did not influence her thoughts or her actions (In fact, I witnessed her actions during the site visit. The powerwielders were unhappy that she was "taking too much time working with the senior staff." She was not "just firing everyone.")

Triangulation

In order to triangulate Dr. Kelly's perceptions and self-reports, I asked everyone I interviewed to answer three questions:

1) In your opinion, how might Dr. Kelly define power? 2) How does Dr. Kelly make decision? 3) How does Dr. Kelly get things done? The following narratives are representative examples of their responses.

A board of education member who had worked in the school district as a teacher for many years before being elected to the Board, talked about the difference in the atmosphere and attitude at the District's Central Office.

> *I've been in this building [district office] and around this school district a long time. And she [Dr. Kelly] must be doing something right. When I walked these halls when [former male superintendent] was here, if I didn't have an appointment with somebody, I didn't go near their office. I didn't have any chance of talking to [the former superintendent] and chances are, I didn't want to. And then, [the superintendent] that followed him, was even worse. People wouldn't even talk to me. They wouldn't smile at me if I passed them. Now, since Dr. Kelly came, people are happy. They're friendly. They work hard to meet your needs. So, I know that something she is doing is making things different.*

Another board member talked about differences between the superintendent that preceded Dr. Kelly and Dr. Kelly:

> *With the previous superintendent, on the day of board meetings, I would actually begin to get a bit tense knowing that I was going to have one or more confrontational issues or situations during the course of a long evening. And not only was I trying to be prepared for what I expected to be the wars of the evening but I was trying to second guess the environment as to who was going to pull something out as a "gotcha." . . . And there was some of that to varying degrees in virtually every vote. . . . With Dr. Kelly all that has changed.*

Another board member made observations about the way she worked with the Board:

She has a team approach, I mean we heard from her lips that the team of eight people, the seven board members and the superintendent needed to do some things. And we bought into not only the letter of it, but the spirit of it. . . . I have an attitude that if I'm really comfortable and I'm not insecure, I don't have any problem with sharing decision-making. And in my opinion, of some other board members, either in this district or in other counties, is that those people feel insecure for whatever reasons, and that they have great difficulty sharing what they perceive to be their power.

A high school teacher also talked about Dr. Kelly's ability to work with others:

I think she was very smart in really getting input from a lot of different areas in the school district when she came in . . . she knows that a lot of the power in the school district depends on the power in the business community and other organizations in the county, and she tried to tie them together. I think she does at least listen to what they say. . . . I think she's very collaborative.

One political figure in the community talked about the way Dr. Kelly made things happen:

I think she would say that it is the ability to make things happen in a positive way. . . . and that way would be through collaboration. I see some real, what I consider democratic action occurring in this district, and I think now we have a superintendent that is very capable to work with that and embellish that and embrace that and support that.

An administrator talked about her work with the administrative staff:

Dr. Kelly is big on team work, big on collaboration. . . . Dr. Kelly listens . . . she is very much willing to allow the meeting to collaborate to the point where I personally am falling off the chair. Because that's not my style. I mean I run a meeting and sometimes get criticized for not letting everybody get their say.

Q. Is there value in being collaborative?

A. If your idea of collaboration is truly to bring people to the table and to try to come to consensus or to a decision, then I think it is very important because I am of the opinion that

you have to have people who are involved, who are affected by a decision, involved in that decision.

From some of the interviews, I came to understand that a component of the notion of shared power was "developing people." For example, when I asked a female central office administrator how Dr. Kelly defined power, she said:

I think she would believe that it is developing people. I mean, she's a teacher, somebody who develops not only individuals, but organizations in the community.

Q. Have you changed, become more developed as a result of working with her?

A. Of course. I think probably she saw potential in me and she gave me opportunities to develop that talent. But, she never, ever put me in a situation that I could not handle without coaching, mentoring, supporting. She's the ultimate coach and mentor. Before any difficult tasks, she always walked through the scenario -- almost role playing -- so that I was comfortable. She was in support of me totally. Also, she's probably one of the few people to give me negative feedback. And a lot of people don't want to do that, they don't want to hurt your feelings. But when I didn't do something as well as it could have been done or as well as I was capable of doing -- it wasn't mean in any way, but it was in a way that I understood what I could do differently the next time. If people don't give you feedback [including negative], you'll never learn.

While the strongest evidence of Dr. Kelly's definition and use of power came in interviews, there was also evidence in many of the local presses, including the Newspaper. Consider the following quotes from the two primary papers:

> [Kelly] says she won't be successful unless district officials, residents, and community and business leaders work together on several key issues facing her administration. . . .
>
> [Kelly] says she isn't planning a major administrative shakeup, and her new staff is included in nearly all decision-making. (Newspaper, 3/17/96, p. 2B)

A headline in the second primary press of the community read: "[Kelly] wants public to get more involved." The article contained the following statement:

> Several [Name] Elementary teachers in attendance were pleased with [Kelly's] remarks when it came to ethics and community involvement. . . . (Second Paper, 3/22/96, p. 1B)).

During the course of the interviews and from the newspapers, I learned that a shared power profile had many components. To describe them all is beyond the scope of this paper, but after hearing the interviews and reading the papers, it was clear that Dr. Kelly defined and used power in collaborative, consensus-building, co-active or interactive ways. And it was Dr. Kelly's concept of power that determined her approach to the media.

The Newspaper and Dr. Kelly View Each Other: Discourse, Analysis, and Discussion

[Data Gathered During First On-Site Visit (January-February 1997)]

The Newspaper's View of Superintendent Kelly

While the Newspaper's representation of the school district was unfairly negative, its representation of the superintendent -- who had been in the district less than a year, and who was known to be an exceptional superintendent -- was disturbing. This section includes 1) participants' perceptions of the Newspaper's view of Dr. Kelly and 2) samples of text from articles in the Newspaper to expose the press's view of Dr. Kelly.

Participants' Perceptions

A board of education member shared his experience with the Newspaper and his opinion about the Newspaper's view of Dr. Kelly:

> *I've just gotten to where I have thick skin. The Newspaper sticks it to me on a regular basis, and I tend to ignore it. Where I really get fed up is when they go beyond allegation and end up with gross misrepresentation of facts. . . . I know more people watch the board meetings on TV than read their editorials so in our meetings, I carefully stick it back [to the press]. But that guarantees that within three to five days I will get another personal attack. Which will be, you know, the usual BS, but it's anti-public education.. . . . And the current superintendent was not their first choice, therefore, she's not going to be treated kindly.*

Many participants pointed out that Dr. Kelly was not the Newspaper's first choice. Mr. Wilson, the media analyst, reported that in her previous position, a district of 60,000 students, Dr. Kelly had a very good relationship with the media, not cozy, but certainly not strictly confrontational. I asked him for his opinion regarding the reason that the Newspaper was so hostile. He answered:

> *Well, a) she was not the "chosen one" for the [Newspaper], and b) the [Newspaper] is vindictive in its approach, and c) the school district was in terrible shape when she came in, and it was hostile at the time because of previous events And Dr. [Kelly's] approach has been not about protecting herself or her image, but one of working to do what can be done to build a good school system. And, you simply cannot have a good educational system without public support. And the [Newspaper] seems to have a campaign to deride and discredit Dr. [Kelly]. And you asked me "why?" and when you do that, you're asking me to get into their heads, and that's tough. I can only speculate. I mean it could just be ego, it could be to stir up reader interest, it could be human frailties of feeling defeated so you come out swinging. Who knows. Who knows. Some people in the newspaper business, or just in the media business, thrive on controversy, that's all. And then, of course, that sells more papers too. So if they write nice things that aren't controversial, they don't thrive.*

An influential member of the business community confirmed what Mr. Wilson's comments:

This is a community that, in general, eats its young. I mean anybody who sticks their neck out to be a leader tends to get it chopped off fairly quickly.

Q. Who does most of the chopping?

A. Well, certainly some of it's through the [Newspaper]. And it's the most negative stuff I've ever dealt with in the newspapers -- they're mean. And in terms of the schools, there must be 50 editorials a year about the schools. And very personal, too. In fact, the superintendent -- she was quoted in 90 some editorials in a year. So, about a third of the editorials have been about the superintendent of the schools.

A journalist in the community echoed the information above and was another who indicated that Dr. Kelly was not the Newspaper's choice for superintendent. He stated that the superintendent who preceded Dr. Kelly had the complete support of the Newspaper's editorial board -- they were editorially committed to Dr. Sanderson (pseudonym for the former superintendent). Even when Dr. Sanderson was forced out of her position because of a multitude of errors and bad judgment (that were documented and publicly known and were in part the reason for the hostility in the school district), the Newspaper stood by her. He added that newspapers typically hold to the notion that they should never admit they are wrong and certainly should never change their position once taking a stand. Thus, when Dr. Kelly was hired, and she was not their candidate of choice, the Newspaper immediately cast her as someone wearing a "black hat."

In addition to Dr. Kelly not being the Newspaper's first choice (or even second), the district was overwhelmed with extreme problems. In an article titled "First day on job for new superintendent: Plenty of problems to solve soon" a minor area newspaper stated:

> [Kelly] is taking on a county beset with problems ranging from overcrowded schools to the use of magnet programs as desegregation tools. And with a budget of [$ amount], she becomes the head of one of the largest companies in [the community]. The lack of public trust stemming from years of board in-fighting -- and the buyout of [Dr. Sanderson -- previous superintendent] -- has stymied attempts at getting a one-cent sales tax passed. With continuing budget cuts, [Kelly] is facing cutting [$ amount] from the

district's 1996-97 budget; she is going to have to find ways to do more with less. (3/18/96, p. 1A)

Sample Text from the Newspaper

Dr. Kelly's beginning in the district was, to say the least, rocky. In fact, before she even took the job, the Newspaper was filled with articles that even the most conservative reader would consider scathing. When Dr. Kelly was offered the job, her first step was the negotiation of a contract. It should be noted that the district wanted Dr. Kelly to start the job in March before she had finished her job in her previous district. The district was struggling along with an interim superintendent while they did the search. So, Dr. Kelly literally worked between districts from the time of her hiring in January until March 15 when she officially took the position doing the job of superintendent in both districts. Her contract negotiations necessarily reflected this unusual demand on her time and strength, and were not considered unusual or out of line by anyone who was familiar with such negotiations.

The typically uneventful process of contract negotiations became the target of a full-blown media attack. The media frenzy lasted for almost 20 days. And although I do not have all of the articles related to this topic in my stack of data, I have 46 articles and editorials from the two primary newspapers in the district. Out of the 46 articles and editorials, 35 of them are from the Newspaper.

After an initial article, "[Kelly] ups ante: $---,--- plus perks" (1/24/96, p. 1B), which proclaimed that Dr. Kelly's "proposal doesn't resemble the school district's offer," the next article led with the headline "Callers blast Kelly's 'ridiculous' requests" (1/25/96, p. 1A). The article quoted callers who said things like: "Never heard of anything so ridiculous in all my life," "She should take a walk," and "Tell her we're sorry and bring in the other candidates." The article also reflected Dr. Kelly's surprise that the early stages of the negotiations were made so public, and while the Newspaper used her surprise to make her

look ignorant, Dr. Kelly at the time was a superintendent in a district in the same state and very experienced with the laws governing public records.

An article from the other primary paper in the district told a different story:

> Board Chairwoman [Name] and Vice-Chairman [Name] issued a joint statement saying the board anticipated the current offer-and-counteroffer process and said they were disappointed it had become an "incendiary media event."
>
> "[Dr. Kelly], the [State's] Superintendent of the Year, possesses excellent educational leadership and business management skills needed by this school district at this time," the statement said. "We look forward to working together . . . to accomplish the district's mission." . . .
>
> Kelly's requests caused an uproar among people who saw her demands as outrageous and said the board should not hire her.
>
> "A lot of people don't understand the negotiation process," board member [Name] said. (Second Paper, 1/27/96, p. 1B)

Two days later, the Newspaper published an editorial titled "Think of schools first, not of [Kelly's] wish list" (1/30/96, editorial page). One sentence in enlarged text stated: "Her attitude jeopardizes voter approval of a badly needed special tax for construction." In this particular editorial the Newspaper's allegiance to the superintendent -- Dr. Sanderson -- who preceded Dr. Kelly can be detected:

> [School District] School Board members have made a worse mess of trying to hire a new superintendent than they did of firing the last one. . . .
>
> Now board members who would not even evaluate, much less support, [Dr. Sanderson] are expressing unquestioned confidence in someone whom they haven't even hired. They are scheduled to meet Wednesday night to discuss negotiations with Dr. [Kelly]. When they do, they should consider how harmful Dr. [Kelly's] attitude -- and theirs -- will be to chances of voters passing a special tax for new schools and an important law designed to eliminate crowded schools.

> Dr. [Kelly] can't be blamed for requesting that she get a four-year contract with automatic renewals, given the board's costly decision to fire [Dr. Sanderson] without cause. [In fact, cause was public.] But Dr. [Kelly's] request for *guaranteed* annual 5 percent raises ([Dr. Sanderson] got no raises) insults all teachers, bus drivers and other employees who haven't had a decent raise in years and won't for some time. Her demands for a car (model specified) and closing costs on her current home insult taxpayers.
>
> Dr. [Kelly's] supporters picked her because they said she knows how to bring a community together. Instead, she has angered the community before even taking the job. (Newspaper, 1/30/96, editorial page)

In this editorial, the Newspaper links Dr. Kelly's request for more money -- than the Board of Education initially offered her -- with overcrowded schools. In this linking, the impression was left with readers that Dr. Kelly's salary would prevent the school district from addressing the bad conditions that existed for the students. On the other hand, the second primary press in the district quoted a couple of people whom they believed help explain the media frenzy. For example, in an article dated 1/30/96, education writers wrote:

> [Kelly's] contract requests may have done more damage than normal because she is coming into a district that already has two black eyes, [Name] said.
>
> "That is a huge problem that this is a small symptom of -- the reservoir of anger that is already there, that was there for [former superintendent -- two superintendents before Kelly] and that was exacerbated by [Dr. Sanderson], " [Name] said. "If the level of satisfaction were higher, this wouldn't have drawn as much attention." (p. 1B)

Thus, while the second primary press was a part of the media attack especially in editorials, it gave significant space to explanations for the extreme nature of the onslaught. Further, the second press was not protecting Dr. Sanderson, but rather reflecting an opinion that I came to understand was more in keeping with the district's and the community's.

To reflect the full force of the Newspaper's attack is difficult to do given the space limitations of this paper. The following quotes, however, from a few articles and editorials display

some of the vehemence underlying the attack. In an editorial titled "Anger? Like the cash, [Kelly] asked for it" were the following comments:

> For Dr. [Kelly], the honeymoon is over before she's been hired. For [the District and community], the question now is whether she *should* be hired. If this fiasco demonstrates her much-touted consensus-building skills, it will be cheaper to keep her in [her previous district].
>
> So far, Dr. [Kelly] has been able to make herself clear only when she's asking for money. Her rambling responses during applicant interviews, for instance, and in an interview publish in the [Newspaper] on Monday, have left people struggling to figure out what she said. For instance, does she back merit pay for teachers? Dr. Kelly to the [Newspaper]: "What we want to do is create the kind of environment that ensures and demands the highest performance." Is that yes or no?
>
> But on merit pay for herself -- and everything else in her contract negotiations with the district -- there's no confusion: Dr. [Kelly] aims to get paid. Unfortunately, some board members who were saying before the interviews that they weren't going to give an inch are apparently willing to give a mile. And that's from a board that had already gone through the exercise of establishing their contract offer up front.

The same editorial ended with the following sentence:

> Considering what the board supposedly was trying to fix by ousting [Dr. Sanderson], taxpayers are justified in saying, "Don't buy, say 'bye.'" (1/26/96, editorial page)

A headline for the "Letters to the Editor" section in the same edition of the Newspaper read "If [Kelly] 'stunned' board, it's incompetent, or she lied." Clearly, the editorial board of the Newspaper had established its agenda.

In contrast, on January 31, 1996, the second primary press in the district wrote what I consider a balanced article that included the following:

[Name], a former principal who worked with 11 county superintendents, sat on a community committee that interviewed the superintendent finalists. He still thinks [Kelly] is the right choice.

"Quality people cost quality money," [Name] said. "This school system needs a good, sound administrator, and I think she is that person."

[Name] also said the negatives will blow over.

"When they see her up close, they will change their minds," [He] said. "She is not a facade. She comes across as believable."

[A second name], who knows [Kelly], said [the community and district] should not use the negotiations to form its opinion of the superintendent candidate.

"What she has asked for is not out of line with what superintendents of other large districts in the country have asked for," [Second Name] said. "You have to understand: If you go after the best and brightest, you have to expect to pay a little bit more. I don't think after people meet her and work with her they will regret spending one dime on that contract."

[A third name] disagreed with people who think the controversial negotiations have all but killed [Kelly's] chances of succeeding in [the district and community].

"There has been no harm done," [Third Name] said. "Has she taken a position that there is going to be busing in the county or not busing, or about redrawing district lines or destroy the curriculum? No. The only harm that has been done is in people's minds."

[A fourth name], legislative director of the [community's] Council of PTAs, had supported [Name], one of the other finalists, for the position. But he thinks the criticism of [Kelly] is coming from a vocal minority. (Second Paper, 1/31/96, p. 6A)

This was just the beginning of the story. And while it would be false to claim that every article was negative, the Newspaper's attacks did not stop after Dr. Kelly's contract was signed. For example, when she asked her area and assistant superintendents to read Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal's book Leading with Soul (1996), one Newspaper article -- titled"[Kelly's]

suggested reading: It's Gibran gone corporate," (2/16/96, p. 1D) -- focused sarcastically on her request and stated "[Leading With Soul] offers a watery theology of common decency most suitable for minds that can't quite grasp the deep moral concepts embodied in the Star Wars philosophy of the Force."

One noticeable and frequently used strategy employed by the Newspaper was to commend the two Board of Education members who commonly took positions against Dr. Kelly -- who in fact were the two who did not vote to hire her -- and to make any board member who agreed with her or supported her look foolish. This type of publicity over time for board members drives a wedge between the superintendent and the board and creates public opinion that board members who are supportive of the superintendent need to be replaced in the next election.

Dr. Kelly's View of the Newspaper

I didn't ask Dr. Kelly direct questions about her view of the Newspaper, rather I : 1) paid close attention during interviews to anything she said in passing; 2) observed how she acted in response to different things the Newspaper did; 3) listened to what others said Dr. Kelly had done or said about the press; and 4) interviewed a district administrator who had the responsibility of directly addressing the staff at the Newspaper. In this section, I share narrative and observation data that falls into those four categories.

Quotes from Dr. Kelly about the Newspaper:

During one interview with Dr. Kelly, I asked her to compare her past experiences with those she was having at the time of the interview. She talked a bit about the differences she saw between press experiences of the past and present:

> *The Newspaper will print things -- I mean -- the more controversial the better. They seem to work to present it in a way that doesn't make the school district look good. And that is a very different approach from my previous experience with the press.*

In another conversation, I asked her how things were going, what she was learning. She responded, "Well, one of the things I am kept in touch with constantly is humility." I continued, "How does that happen?" She answered quickly, "The press teaches me."

Observation of Dr. Kelly's public reaction to the Newspaper:

In a televised board of education meeting, Dr. Kelly publicly thanked the press for bringing issues to her attention that needed to be addressed. She added that the press, in essence, served the district when they used their time and staff to pursue these issues. These comments were made after a story was reported by the Newspaper in a very damaging manner. The problem that was the focus of the story was something that needed to be "fixed," but the reporting was a personal attack on Dr. Kelly, when in fact the problem pre-existed her tenure.

In an Administrative Council meeting, one of Dr. Kelly's central office administrators asked her how she would respond to the press's aggressiveness. She replied that her response could not be "in kind." Basically, she believed that she should practice the adage, "treat others as you want to be treated."

Quotes from others about Dr. Kelly's attitude toward the Newspaper:

One teacher recalled something Dr. Kelly had said that was representative of reports from others interviewed.

> *During the first meeting she had at our school, she said that she couldn't make or break herself or make decisions solely based on what the media thought because many times the media doesn't represent the public. And the more I become involved in public education, the more critical I am of the media.*

Interview with district administrator

In an interview with a district administrator who worked directly with the Newspaper, I came to more fully understand Dr. Kelly's approach to the press. First, he stated that Dr. Kelly

had told him that "you can't ignore them [Newspaper and media in general], but you can't expect them to carry our water for us." He said that she continued to focus on what was the right thing to do in any situation, and that she espoused the view that "we have to do what is right to get good press."

Perhaps one of the most interesting views he reported was that she believed that "public relations solutions don't work." He continued by saying she believed that public relations solutions most often were just ways to sugarcoat the truth, and she wanted no part of them. He said her policy was, "No public relations," just fundamental issues related to core values -- ethics, competence, and accountability -- and that as an organization, the school district must not only identify problems, but also identify solutions.

Finally, he observed that she held to a course driven by a consistent message -- "do the right thing" -- and always worked to be more inclusive in terms of how information should be shared. He added that the demands of the Newspaper were incredible. (For example, one of the Newspaper's practices was to open the superintendent's mail -- in the district office -- before she had a chance to read it herself. This practice was in place before she came into the district, and although she was uncomfortable with it, she decided that to change it would heighten the accusations of the Newspaper that she was hiding something from them.) He further explained that his office/staff was being completely reorganized to meet the demands of the press. Dr. Kelly believed, he said, that the school district must meet their demands. To do otherwise would fuel animosity, because at a practical level the journalists needed information to do their work. Their animosity created "armed camps," he said, with the reporters "shaking the Sunshine Laws in the faces of school district staff."

Dr. Kelly's Affect on the "Crisis in Representation" and the Press

[Data Gathered One Year Later, Second Site-Visit (January, 1998)]

One year after my first extended site visit, I returned to the district to do a few more in-depth interviews and gather newspaper articles in order to determine what effect Dr. Kelly's power with/to philosophy had on the power over practice of the Newspaper. What I learned in interviews was that the animosity had eased. The district administrator in charge of communications with the press told me how this had come to pass.

First, he talked about how Dr. Kelly constantly went out to the community -- to organizations such as Rotary and Kiwanas -- groups as small as twenty-five people. He had advised her that doing this type of thing was almost impossible because of the size of the county, but she had not followed his advice. He told me, "She deeply believes in the role of these types of service groups in society and is committed to reaching them." I also observed Dr. Kelly's commitment to being at myriad types of gatherings in order to directly communicate with all types of people about the importance of education.

Second, he said that the reorganization of his office enabled the school district to be more forthcoming with communication. Third, everyone was attending to the media in order to ensure access to information in an open and candid way. The new established attitude was: "We don't want to hide it, we want to fix it." This attitude, he believed, gave the school district more credibility. "We are not at war like we once were," he stated.

Fourth, he told me that he (as a representative of the district's new position with the media) had approached the press with the questions: "How can we get you what you need? and, How can you help us get you what you need?" He said the last question was extremely important, and that once the press was somewhat convinced that the school district was delivering what they promised, the press was willing to be more reasonable in their requests for information. He shared that earlier their requests took a tremendous amount of time and manpower when, in fact, the press

didn't actually need all of the information. He felt strongly that direct contacts with the editors and the reporters had helped the situation.

Fifth, he stated that the political climate was changing due to acts on the part of the state legislature. In this case, the Newspaper had been supporting a referendum for a one-cent sales tax which would ultimately build more schools. The act of the legislation changed how school capacity was calculated resulting in the disappearance of overcrowding (on paper) in the schools. At this point, the Newspaper took up the criticism of the legislature. At the same time, the district communications administrator went to the press with a message from the school district. "Our message to them was," he told me, "every time you make the school look bad, you undermine your support of the referendum." During such a situation, while the focus of the Newspaper had shifted to the greater evils of the legislature, he saw the Newspaper beginning to change the way they did business related to the news about the school district and the superintendent. At such moments, he confided, he could count on the "intellectual dishonesty" of the press. It was this type of dishonesty that he believed could help the press move to a position where Dr. Kelly would be allowed to wear a white hat instead of a black hat.

In fact, I witnessed an example of intellectual dishonesty during my second visit to the district. During that visit there was a lot of activity around the issue of going to the voters with a referendum for an additional half-cent sales tax to generate revenue earmarked for building more schools. In the month (December) prior to my visit, the Board of Education -- with Dr. Kelly's recommendation -- had made the decision that the referendum should go on the ballot in the fall. Board members were out in the community actively building support for "yes" votes.

In a surprise move, the State proclaimed that money from the lottery would be dispersed to school districts who submitted, within a short time frame, construction plans for using the funds. The funds for the district were substantial.

A flurry of meetings were held to answer questions about how much money could be used over a period of time, how much construction the district could wisely manage and properly oversee, and the wisdom of asking taxpayer for funds when, in fact, the district could use -- in a

practical sense -- only so much money within a particular time frame. Concerns were raised about the political implications for Board members, some of whom were up for reelection, and who had intensely worked to gain voter support for the referendum. In addition, Dr. Kelly noted that since all of the school districts in the state were getting funds, the construction materials and labor markets would be flooded with money and contracts, resulting in skyrocketing prices.

To add more fuel to the fire, the issue of timing was critical. To allow Board members to continue raising support for a referendum that never made the ballot was not only dangerous, but also lacked integrity and was unethical. Thus, based on an ethic of "doing the right thing," in an unprecedented fashion, top level administrators led by Dr. Kelly went to the Board -- who were completely unaware of the possibility -- to recommend a reversal in the decision to take a referendum to the voters in the fall.

The Board was stunned. Not surprisingly they felt undermined and blindsided. The Newspaper's first article stated:

> Schools Superintendent [Kelly] Monday recommended abandoning the campaign for a half-penny sales tax for school construction -- only six weeks after pushing for it.
>
> Among her reasons for distancing herself from the Sept. 1 vote: There might not be enough time to come up with a precise plan detailing what would be built with the money.
>
> "It's not very doable," [Kelly] said at the school board workshop at [Name] High School.
>
> Her argument went beyond the timetable. Despite continued crowding, she said the short-term need for dollars just isn't there, since an infusion of $___ million in lottery money will be spent over the next 18 months on an overwhelming __ projects, big and small. And, she said, those projects will glut the construction market, driving up costs. (1/27/98, p. 1A)

The article continued with quotes from Board members, "There is no way I can support a delay," said [Board Member]. "I don't expect to see incredible changes in our plan. I will not sit and allow our children to wait in the wings until we come up with the best time."

Shortly after, on 1/28/98, the second primary press printed the following editorial statement:

> [Kelly] is only being prudent in fine-tuning her strategy to deal with a rapidly changing set of circumstances. But both board members and voters have reason to be confused by her abrupt about-face on the sales-tax vote. (Second Press, editorial page)

Back to the activities of the Newspaper: On 1/29/98 an editorial blasted Dr. Kelly's position. In a damming way, the editorial stated,

> Her reversal reinforces the need for board members to find out whether Dr. [Kelly] shares their priorities. . . . Rather than invent excuses for delay -- a **preposterous-sounding construction glut** [my emphasis], unclear state guidelines -- the district should tout the schools that have been built and the need that remains.
>
> With each delay, more students suffer. With each delay, more parents hoping for relief grow increasingly frustrated. With each delay, the chances for success grow slimmer.

Interestingly, a national newspaper, The Wall Street Journal, with much greater credibility than the district's own Newspaper, published a story on (2/18/98) that confirmed Dr. Kelly's rationale against the fall referendum when it stated:

> School districts are asking for much more classroom-construction money for the coming year than lawmakers expected, raising fears that the Legislature's new lottery-bond initiative will spark inflation in [State's] hot building market. . . .
>
> Rep. [Name] and Sen. [Name], who led their chambers' efforts in crafting the program, say their big concern is the inflationary potential of injecting so much money into the market at once. Already, [State's] nonresidential construction industry is running "about as close to capacity as you can get, maybe a little over," says [Name] a University of [State] urban planning professor. Pumping more than $1 billion into the . . . school construction sector undoubtedly would create temporary shortages, say Prof. [Name]. "Some contractors are going to find themselves in a wonderful spot," he adds. (p. F2)

How did the Newspaper respond to this credible source's echo of Dr. Kelly's position (which she asserted almost three weeks before the Wall Street Journal reported it)? On 2/20/98 I found one article titled "School Cash Crunch II." In the middle of the article was the following paragraph:

> More than two-thirds of the money has been spoken for, The Wall Street Journal reported this week. Lawmakers had hoped to dole it out over five years. Now they worry about school districts swamping the construction industry with orders -- **a concern shared by [Name] Schools Superintendent Dr. [Kelly]** [my emphasis] -- and glutting the bond market with their bonds.

There was no mention of the Newspaper's editorial position that Dr. Kelly was just "making up preposterous excuses." Clearly, "intellectual dishonesty" was at work. In my experience, when a superintendent proposes that a tax increase be delayed, with sound business and economic reasoning, s/he is applauded loudly. Dr. Kelly's foresight, in this case however, was buried in the middle of an article and barely mentioned.

Even so, this "barely mentioned" piece is evidence that the Newspaper was slowly changing its position with Dr. Kelly. The same article moves the blame for the whole money crunch to the state legislature, something that the school district administrator in charge of communications said was happening more and more often. So, while the Newspaper was still on the attack, the frequency and intensity has lessened. Further, the Newspaper has turned its antagonistic attention away from Dr. Kelly and the school district more and more often.

I noted during my second visit that Dr. Kelly's work was making a difference in the district giving the Newspaper reason to focus elsewhere. Strides were evident even amidst the financial nightmare -- misuse of funds, poor oversight practices, major budget cuts -- that Dr. Kelly inherited from the previous administration.

Dr. Kelly held the philosophy to "tell all." She believed that mistakes as well as successes should be shared with the public. This philosophy was tough to live at times because of the multitude of poor and even illegal practices that preexisted her entering the district and further, because of the hostile press.

The fact that the poor financial practices were not all uncovered at once, but slowly, as oversight and auditing groups were put in place, added to the difficulty. Stories of overspending and misappropriation of funds continued to hit the press. Even so, the position of the district was stronger at the time of my second visit. Evidence of that newfound strength could be found in quotes from Board members in one of the secondary area newspapers in an article titled "School Board candidacies take shape." The first paragraph follows a quoted statement from one of the Board members who had decided not to run again (note: His candidacy was not at stake as he spoke.):

> The most important issue, however, is support of Superintendent Dr. [Kelly], who [male Board member] feels is moving the district in the right direction. Even recent revelations of financial problems show that [Kelly] is cleaning up previous financial problems, he said.
>
> "If they hadn't come out, that would mean we were either whitewashing it or we were in denial that there were problems in the district" [male Board member] said. "It is hard for the public to realize that. There isn't a real sense of history among the general population about how these things came to be the way they are."
>
> Cooperation with city and county government and work force development programs will be [another male Board member who will run again]'s main campaign issues, but school overcrowding, construction funding and financial accountability will obviously be hot issues, he said.
>
> [Female Board member who will run again] hopes voters will remember that changing the way the district operates is not going to happen easily or quickly.
>
> "We are going to turn stones over that are not pretty, but that is not going to dissuade me from continuing to look under every rock so that we can make sure that the inadequate funds for education are spent wisely," she said. (1/23/98, p.1)

This article made it clear to me that the Board of Education was supportive of Dr. Kelly's work in the district even when it meant "telling all" about "skeletons" discovered in various "closets."

Finally, returning to the comments of the district administrator in charge of communications -- he ended his conversation with me by stating, "Dr. Kelly is resistant to manipulation and so grounded in her sense of self and in her beliefs," that she will continue to do what is right.

The findings from the study follow in the next section.

Findings and Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to examine how an urban superintendent responded to a "crisis in representation" in the hopes that such an examination would be instructive for other superintendents, who are also scrutinized by the press. The importance of such instruction lies with the common understanding that when superintendents -- as symbols of education at large -- are unfairly represented, whole school districts are unfairly represented.

This examination resulted in several findings which promise to be instructive: 1) The woman superintendent's definition and use of power -- "power with/to" -- permeated her response to the media. She chose to use power in collaborative ways. She constantly convened and met with the representative bodies of the large community in an effort to unify and recognize all voices, the voices of those misrepresented, in order to construct additional more fully representative official knowledge about the community and its schools. 2) All representatives of the community and school district in this single-case study agreed that the media misrepresented them, their school district, their superintendent. 3) There was a sense of helplessness, a true loss of the "voice" of everyone because the media took an oppressively dominant position of power in the community studied. The community, school district, and superintendent were "objectified" by the press (hooks, 1989). 4) Those representatives of the community at-large (1.3 million people) expected the superintendent to "fix" the schools for the community in spite of the problems the school district and the superintendent faced due to the press. 5) Representatives of the community and the school district in the study agreed that the negative press representation of the school district was damaging to the education and welfare of the children in the district, as well as damaging to

the economic health of the community. 6) Through a philosophy of power as shared, Dr. Kelly was able to negotiate spaces where she and others could begin to represent the school district in a more positive light. Moving without the typical public relations solutions, she advanced beliefs that accepted even the most negative of adversaries -- the Newspaper. With these beliefs as foundation, district personnel and Board of Education members took action to "do the right thing" and to "tell all." And as the press began to see consistent action, their attention began to turn elsewhere. 7) The problem of this negative press was not "fixed" even though the district was experiencing some relief. This particular press just moved on to other targets, and indeed, turned its attention back on the school district, at times, as can be seen in the case of the referendum. To more fully change the practices of the Newspaper would take an innovative, courageous, and comprehensive community-wide effort. Dr. Kelly was well aware of this fact as were other people in the school district. They believed that they could never become self-satisfied even though the school district and thus, the community was beginning to have space to represent itself in a more balanced way.

The study outcome suggests that the superintendent's response to the press was effective, in large part, because her concept of power was "with/to" work with others to accomplish goals. This conception was the foundation for a philosophy of inclusive action -- on the part of the superintendent and the district -- that accepted rather than attacked the adversarial press.

Further, the study outcome indicates that all superintendents need the skills necessary to help communities find ways for individual and collective self-representations in order that public schools and communities have fair opportunities to be visible, respected, and considered legitimate. Such work requires an understanding of the politics of representation and the nature of collaborative, shared power in order that the relationship between the public schools and the media can be positively negotiated.

Endnotes:

1. Because this study is a part of a larger study done to examine several issues related to superintendents and power, the method section is basically the same as that found in other papers written from the larger data base [See Brunner, C. C. (1998). The new superintendency supports innovation with collaborative decision-making. Contemporary Education, 69 (2), 79-82.]

2. The research described in this paper was supported by the National Academy of Education's Spencer Fellowship. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Academy of Education or the Spencer Foundation.

3. I made a concerted effort to include people of color in the current project. Unfortunately, those I interviewed either left the superintendency before I started site visits or their definitions of power fell clearly into the "mixed" category.

4. I asked each superintendent to suggest several people whom they believed knew their practice well enough to discuss it with me. After receiving the names, I interviewed two people of my choice.

5. In order to determine how the superintendents defined and used power, I asked them three questions: 1) How do you define power? 2) How do you make decisions? and 3) How do you get things done? In the triangulation interviews, I asked two people who worked with the superintendents (board of education members, administrators, central office staff, teachers parents, and community members) the following questions: 1) How do you think the superintendent defines power? 2) How does the superintendent make decisions? 3) How does the superintendent get things done? After the three introductory questions, the interview approach was non-standardized, guided by cues from the interviewee (Patton, 1980; Guba & Lincoln, 1981), and intended to elicit "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

6. While this gender difference in the way female and male superintendents define power may be surprising to the reader, it was not a surprise to me. In an earlier single-case study (1992-94), I studied the power structure of community that had hired a female superintendent. Using Hunter's (1953) *reputational method*, I identified the power network in the community at-large and in the educational community. Unlike Hunter, I developed lists of both male and female powerwielders. Overwhelmingly, the male powerwielders defined power as power over and the female powerwielders defined power as power with/to. In fact, I found that women in the traditionally masculine position of superintendent are usually viewed as successful when they eschew a masculine "power over" orientation and instead employ a "feminine" notion of power (Miller 1993) -- what Sarason (1990, p. 61) calls "power to" or an ability to act or enable others to act or what Follet (1942, p. 101) calls "power with," a jointly developed or co-active power. For a fuller description of this study see Brunner, C. C. (1995). By power defined: Women in the superintendency. Educational Considerations, 22(2), 21-27, and Brunner, C. C., & Schumaker, P. (in press). Power and gender in 'New View' public schools. Policy Studies Journal.

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